

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

HEARING

TWO YEARS AFTER THE COUP: RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM IN A CONTESTED BURMA

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Virtual Hearing

P A R T I C I P A N T S

USCIRF COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Nury Turkel, Chair
Abraham Cooper, Vice Chair
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P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIR TURKEL: Good morning and thank you for joining the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's hearing on religious freedom in Burma, two years after the military junta seized power in a coup.

My name is Nury Turkel, and I am the current chair at USCIRF. For those of you not familiar, USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government body created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, or IRFA.

USCIRF's mandate is to monitor religious freedom abroad and to make policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

Our work is led by nine commissioners appointed by the President and leadership of both political parties in the House of Representatives and the Senate and is supported by professional staff members of 20.

Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory authority under IRFA to convene this important

hearing.

As many of you know, Burma's military, known as junta, Tatmadaw, seized control over the institutions of the state in February 2021, ending the country's near decade old experimentation with quasi-democracy.

It subsequently set up a façade of a government through the State Administration Council, or SAC. This military coup came just a few months after the November 2020 elections, in which military-aligned parties had faced a crushing defeat.

USCIRF has consistently reported for many years the Burmese military is the primary perpetrator of violence against country's ethnic and religious minorities, including the Rohingya community.

It was the main force responsible for atrocities against the Rohingya in 2017, which the Biden Administration determined last year to have constituted genocide and crimes against humanity.

The Tatmadaw has also been responsible for

repeating the same tactics it has used against Rohingya community to target all dissenters and religious minorities, including Christian communities in Chin, Kachin, and Karen states.

I am joined by USCIRF's Vice Chair Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Commissioner Stephen Schneck, Commissioner Frank Wolf, Commissioner Fred Davies, and Commissioner David Curry.

We'll begin with opening remarks from Vice Chair Cooper and Commissioner Schneck. Then we will hear from our witnesses: Priscilla Clapp, Senior Advisor at the United States Institute of Peace; Kyaw Zeyar Win, Burma Technical Specialist at the International Republican Institute; Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director, Chin Association of Maryland; and Wai Wai Nu, prominent Rohingya Burmese activist on Rohingya and women's issues.

After that, I will moderate a brief conversation among the speakers with some opening questions.

Now it's my pleasure to ask Vice Chair Cooper to make some remarks.

VICE CHAIR COOPER: Good morning.

Thank you, Chair Turkel.

It's an honor to participate in today's hearings. I have visited Burma a number of years ago, and it's an issue very close to my heart. I want to thank all those who have joined us today for this important discussion.

The United States government has been active, if too slow at times, from USCIRF's perspective, in calling out atrocities and other violations of human rights in Burma.

In March of last year, as my colleague mentioned, the Biden Administration designated as genocide and crimes against humanity the atrocities that Burmese authorities, including the Tatmadaw, perpetrated against the Rohingya community in August 2017.

USCIRF had recommended this designation since 2019, as we argued that this designation would aid international efforts to hold the Burmese authorities and the Tatmadaw accountable for gross violations of human rights, including religious

freedom.

USCIRF has consistently advocated that the United States government intervene in support of the ongoing court case at the International Court of Justice and the investigation at the International Criminal Court.

USCIRF has also been monitoring the progress of the case in Argentina and more recently in Germany under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Since the time of the coup, the U.S. government has sought to coordinate international partners in holding the Burmese authorities accountable. For example, it has pushed for regional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, known as ASEAN, to take the lead in finding a regionally driven answer to what has essentially been a decades-long problem: the intervention and indeed domination of Burma's military in civilian affairs.

The U.S. has also targeted various officials, agencies, and industries who are

responsible for human rights violations and for the country's civil conflict itself.

However, USCIRF has taken note of the glaring omission of reference to religious freedom violations in the various U.S. sanctions against Burmese authorities.

At the beginning of this month, our government took the first step in targeting revenue sources for the military, such as Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, by sanctioning energy officials, such as Myo Myint Oo, Aung Min, and Than Min.

However, the U.S. has yet to coordinate with regional partners, such as Japan, to close investment opportunities feeding the authoritarian regime.

Nonetheless, the U.S. government has demonstrated a sincere and meaningful commitment to the democratic cause in Burma, advocating for respect for the freedom of religion or belief in that country.

As Burma has now entered its third year following the military coup, there appears to be no

end in sight to the conflict, particularly as the SAC continues to block any genuine democratic transition or peacekeeping initiatives.

Therefore, the effort of the U.S. government and its like-minded partners to pursue justice and accountability for the horrors that Burma's military junta have visited upon Burma's own people represent a crucial step to ensuring that any succeeding government must recognize and support justice for the Rohingya people.

It is, however, just a step. Additional steps must be taken. These must include recognizing the atrocities that the SAC has committed virtually every day since the coup, the *raison d'être* for the various ethnic armies, and the way ethnic religious minorities have been impacted.

The path toward a democratic Burma and a peaceful end to the current conflict must finally secure the fundamental right of freedom of religion or belief for all Burmese, whether Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, atheist, or any other religious

identity.

Allow me one personal note. In visiting this amazing country some years ago, I had a meeting at the White House at their new capital. That's not for today. I'm here to listen. But we opened the Simon Wiesenthal Center's exhibition, "Courage to Remember," on the Nazi Holocaust, in the Rangoon Synagogue, historic synagogue, once located in what was a thriving Jewish neighborhood.

Until this day, I remember that the now predominantly Muslim neighborhood were the people who cared and protected this house of worship. That is the image I will always keep of the people of Burma, and with God's help and the activists who are here today, we can perhaps help move things in the right direction.

With that, I would like to turn the floor over to my distinguished colleague, Commissioner Schneck, who would like to say a few words as well.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thank you, Rabbi Cooper, and thank you for adding those personal remarks, and I think I can speak for everybody on

the Commission in having those same hopes.

Burma has faced an ongoing struggle of civil war and brutal military repression for much for much its history.

The brief decade of quasi-democracy that ended in February 2021 offered a tenuous respite. It was a period of opening civil and political freedom as well as significant economic growth. It was, however, also a period of missed opportunity.

Chief among these missed opportunities was the re-enfranchisement of the Rohingya people, whom Burma has deprived of citizenship since 1982.

The continued failures of the National League of Democracy, or NLD, led by the once-lauded Aung San Suu Kyi, to address the denial of Rohingyas' citizenship and rights perpetuated and even enabled the Tatmadaw's crimes against humanity and eventual genocidal actions against the Rohingya people.

This glaring mistake haunts the National Unity Government—even today—which is comprised primarily of NLD officials who escaped the Tatmadaw

crackdown following the coup.

In November of last year, I had the opportunity to meet with refugees from the Chin and Zomi communities in Malaysia, and various religious communities of the Rohingya peoples at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. The overwhelming majority of the people with whom I spoke with of these refugees are committed to returning to their homes in post-conflict Burma, a Burma that is democratic, federal, and fully recognizes the rights of all its ethnic and religious communities.

That quasi-democratic period before 2021 also saw a Burma unable to make amends with the patchwork of ethnic armies that had formed across the country, many of which have enjoyed the support of ethnic and religious communities.

Amongst this conflict, the situation of the Rohingya people only deteriorated. In 2017, the Burmese authorities and military led a clearing campaign that committed gross atrocities against the Rohingya that in March of last year, the Biden administration finally recognized as genocide.

Throughout this conflict with the Burmese government and military, the Rohingya have also been victims of attacks and persecution from the Buddhist Arakan Army. The hope for return has been on pause, in other words, since the 2021 coup.

Furthermore, while violations against the religious freedom of Burma's Christians diminished during the decade of quasi-democracy, we have seen that they have once again returned to a terrifying level following that coup.

The SAC and Tatmadaw have attacked, bombed, burned, and otherwise targeted churches, Christian leaders, and Christian communities.

The SAC has pinned its legitimacy, in part, on the state sponsorship of hard-line Buddhist nationalists, some of whom have openly advocated for violence against religious minorities.

The SAC has also pledged to, quote-unquote, "protect" Buddhism through the law by prosecuting blasphemy and allegations of insults to that religious tradition.

It is clear to USCIRF that religious freedom is not a priority of the SAC. It is therefore logical to conclude that a Burma run exclusively by the SAC will not protect religion, will not prioritize religious freedom.

The real question before us, then, is what the United States can do to protect religious freedom in Burma and those most vulnerable communities who are in desperate need of that protection.

With the passage of the Burma Unified through Rigorous Military Accountability Act, also known as the Burma Act of 2022, the United States is empowered to engage with the myriad of pro-democracy groups, opposition forces, and ethnic armed organizations.

Through this hearing, we at USCIRF ask how the United States government can place religious freedom at the center of its discussion with these diverse organizations, particularly when discussing the construction and development of a post, a post-SAC Burma.

To answer this, and to update our understanding of the current situation on the ground, we have assembled an accomplished team of Burma experts to update the Commission on current religious freedom conditions in the country and to provide all of us with recommendations on how we can better monitor, better advocate for freedom of religion or belief in Burma, as we advise our counterparts throughout the United States government.

I want to sincerely thank each of our witnesses here today for their time, their contribution, for their sacrifices, and for all of the effort they take in their daily lives to pursue the protection of this fundamental right for the long-suffering people of their country.

I will now turn the proceedings back over to Chairman Turkel. Chairman Turkel.

CHAIR TURKEL: Commissioner Schneck, thank you so much.

I wanted to apologize for the technical glitch earlier when I was delivering my opening

remarks.

With that, we're going to move on to our witnesses. Our first witness is Priscilla Clapp, a Senior Advisor at the United States Institute of Peace.

Ms. Clapp, you may begin your testimony.

MS. CLAPP: Thank you very much, Commissioner Turkel.

I am very pleased to have been invited to testify today before this Commission. Your work is very, very important, and it has particular importance in the context of Burma. I call it Burma today, as in a way as a sign of disrespect for the military, who changed the name to Myanmar.

The military coup of February 1, 2021 plunged Myanmar into a-Burma-into nationwide chaos and indiscriminate violence by military and police against the civilian population.

Two years later, the country is essentially lawless and conflict between the military and a variety of armed opposition forces has spread across much of the country, with the

most intense fighting taking place in both the heartland, where most ethnic Bama Buddhist majority is concentrated, and in select peripheral areas populated by minority ethnic groups practicing a variety of religions.

Under these circumstances of conflict, it is mostly difficult to distinguish religious discrimination or persecution from the general denial of freedoms by the coup regime and their general animosity toward ethnic minorities and civilian opposition.

Now we know from history, long history, that the military has very deep-seated prejudices against non-Buddhist religions—all of them—considering them to be foreign influences in the country that are unwelcome.

But under the conflict conditions today, everybody who is against the regime, and that includes the majority of the Buddhist community, is equally targeted by the military.

When the military wrested power in the coup, the generals immediately arrested and jailed

the top leaders, cabinet ministers, and other senior officials of the elected civilian government and proceeded to erase all the political, social and economic reforms instituted during the ten years of relative liberalization from 2011 to 2021.

The civilian population was instantly subjected to strict controls over all aspects of life, including religion.

The coup and its threat of a return to military government was met by fierce and determined opposition across most of the country, particularly in urban centers. Now this initial opposition was largely mass peaceful protests.

But when the military began to order snipers to shoot to kill and began to take force, use force against these peaceful protesters, many of the young people felt that they needed to take up arms to begin protecting themselves and the rest of the civilian population from the military assault.

Some of them initially fled to ethnic areas where there were armed ethnic groups,

particularly Karen State, which had happened after other earlier protests, and they were given safe haven by these ethnic armed groups. Many of them in the center of the country began to form peoples' defense forces, small, armed guerilla groups.

Now these are people that were not trained at all, but over time, and it's been a two-year period, they have become actually trained, uniformed and active guerilla forces against the military, and they're taking a big toll on the military, but they are largely trained—many of them have been trained by the ethnic armed groups because there are now a number of these ethnic armed groups that are siding with the opposition openly and harboring them and fighting together with them.

So that has caused a wave of violence, violent conflict, across a very large part of the country. In fact, in his recent announcement that the elections were being postponed, the top general, Min Aung Hlaing, admitted that the military controls less than half the country now,

and that's why they can't run elections.

That is a very telling admission on his part because he has been pretending all along that the military was in control.

In the weeks and months after the coup, various elements of the opposition developed organized identities: such as the Committee Representing the Pyithu Hluttaw, or Parliament, which we call the CRPH, for elected political leaders; the Civil Defense Movement, or CDM, for the striking civil servants, and I would say that a very large portion of the civil servants are no longer working for the government. This includes, you know, hospitals, teachers, as well as people that work for the government, the General Strike Committee, various ethnic minority political parties, and civil society organizations.

Leaders from these groups quickly came together in the National Unity Consultative Committee, NUCC, that you will hear more about later probably, and the National Unity Government, the NUG, which is the most-between these-these two

bodies are the most diverse governing bodies in the history of Burma—to formulate—they formed to make plans for an alternative democratic federal government.

They are advocating a complete overhaul not only of government but in a way of society. They are not putting it that way, but I am. Because they really want to change the way that Burmese society looks at itself and to eliminate much of the discrimination that exists. This is a very tall order, and it's going to take a long time, but this is their ambition, and they're working on it very hard.

I have been watching this, this process, very, very closely for the last two years, and talking—we talk frequently with people on the ground there, and it is—I am struck by the degree of unity that they are achieving.

They haven't reached, you know, a totally unified goal yet because there's still a deep reservoir of distrust between the, well, on the part of the ethnic groups vis-à-vis the Bama

majority that has ruled them for so many years. They have a hard time believing that they could actually come together, but at any rate, they are working on it, and I think there's been great progress over the two years.

But the way the conflict has progressed has affected all three of the major religions, including Buddhism. Religious figures and facilities have not been spared from assault by the junta military although the patterns of attacks suggest that violence against religion per se has been motivated more by military considerations than by prejudice against particular religions.

In other words, military commanders undoubtedly see religious figures and facilities as sources of support and safe haven for the resistance forces.

Furthermore, all three religions, as I said, have been equally, more or less equally targeted by military assault on the opposition.

Buddhists themselves have been deeply affected by the coup, to the extent that the

military leaders over the years have gradually “weaponized” Buddhism as part of their justification for maintaining strict control over the country’s governance.

Portraying Christian and Muslim religions as examples of foreign interference and threats to the country that must be suppressed, military leaders have propagated a radical form of ethnic Bama Buddhist nationalism.

Over time, an extremist minority of the population that adheres to this justification for military rule has become the base of support for the military political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party, or USDP.

The USDP incorporated this radical version of Buddhist nationalism into its campaign slogans for the 2020 elections and lost badly to the NLD in the NLD landslide.

In the wake of the coup, a number of prominent monks came out as staunch supporters of the military leaders, promoting violence against the resistance and encouraging their followers

among the monkhood to take up arms themselves against perceived political opponents.

They preached that the coup was necessary to save the country from becoming an Islamic state and that the military chief is the protector of Myanmar's "race and religion," meaning Bama Buddhist nationalism.

Because the large majority of Myanmar's Buddhists remain faithful to the original, essentially peaceful, form of the religion, this has created deep divisions inside Buddhist religion in Myanmar, Burma, setting Buddhists against each other.

Since the coup, this religious division has turned violent. As in previous rebellions against military rule in Burma, especially the Saffron Revolution of 2007, most monks remain on the side of the people against military brutality and excessive mistreatment of the civilian population.

They adhere to the fundamentally peaceful tenets of Buddhism and openly side with those

opposing the coup.

Buddhist nationalists to form a—I'm sorry. Thousands of monks have been detained and killed in some 100 Buddhist religious buildings, including 20 monasteries of Magway and Sagaing, that have been destroyed. This is in the center of the country.

In assessing the effect of the coup on religious freedom, it is difficult to distinguish between religion and ethnicity, as I said. The ethnic minority areas most closely associated with the anti-coup resistance in collaboration with local civilian defense forces are Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and Rakhine states, where the majority of the country's Christians and Muslims reside.

These areas appear to have all been targeted for attack by the military because of their collaboration with the civilian opposition and their ongoing wars against the military, and not necessarily as a campaign against minority religions per se, even though some of the victims may see religious motivation.

In Rakhine State, for example, the Arakan Army, which is a rather new ethnic army—it's ethnic Rakhine Buddhists—they have been fighting the military for years and quite successfully. Right now there is a pause in that fighting, but it is going to resume, I think, at some point, and the Arakan Army has actually been associating itself with the NUG and the resistance in the rest of the country, and they have been training some of the People's Defense Forces in the middle of the country.

As I mentioned earlier, there's long-standing religious discrimination within the Burmese military. On the whole, aside from exacerbating the deep division within Buddhism that has been brewing for years, it is difficult to separate religious freedom from other freedoms as particular victims of the coup.

However, religious freedom is, nonetheless, a victim of decades-long military rule in which religion has been used to divide the population and subjugate minorities.

The prime examples, a prime example, as many have already said, is the treatment of Rohingya, who have been singled out by the military as foreign and unwelcome despite their long history as a integral part of western Myanmar.

Now, isolation began during the Ne Win years and became intense during the Than Shwe regime, when military began to demonize them as an external threat to the country.

The generals proceeded to militarize Rakhine State and foment tensions between the Rakhine Buddhist population and their Rohingya neighbors. Military governments also marginalized other Muslims and Christians, placing obstacles in the way of religious practice and forcing subjugated ethnic and religious minorities to convert to Buddhism in order to receive basic services.

Weaponization of religion has a long history with Myanmar's military rulers, who, beginning with General Ne Win, have maintained that Christianity and Islam were introduced into the

country by British colonialists as a deliberate means of suppressing the Bama Buddhist majority.

Today's military leaders and their extremist supporters have added the Organization for Islamic Cooperation to the list of foreign entities promoting an Islamist take-over of the country.

As a reaction to their excessive paranoia about malign foreign influence corrupting the country, previous military governments have applied the antidote of "Burmanization," with Buddhism as the only official religion, marginalizing and at times even outlawing the practice of other religions.

Churches and mosques are generally required to seek official permission to hold services, which is often denied. Although these restrictions were eased during the NLD government between 2016 and 2021, they have become more severe since the coup.

Citizens of other races and religions are systematically denied equal citizenship, as well as

equal economic and political opportunity.

Membership for Christians in the military and civil service is strictly limited and for Muslims entirely forbidden. These restrictions do not apply to Buddhists.

It's clear that religious freedom in Burma has no future should the coup regime succeed in its quest to reinstitute harsh military control over the country's governance.

Army commander and head of the junta regime, General Min Aung Hlaing, and other leaders of the junta are conservative, mostly from the Bama ethnic majority, and practice a radical form of Buddhism, as I have described.

It defies the traditional Buddhist respect for living creatures and natural order. They see political liberalization, efforts to reduce military control of the country's political and economic institutions, and modern social trends as unwelcome foreign influence and interference.

It is perhaps a telling sign of their vision for the future that the campaign slogans of

the military political party, the USDP, call for strict conformance with Buddhism and paint other religions as foreign, even today.

During the two-year post-coup period, the resistance movement has not withered, as happened with past rebellions, but has continued to expand becoming more organized and effective in fighting military control.

On the second anniversary of the coup, the top general, Min Aung Hlaing, as himself admitted, that the military now controls less than half the country.

The resistance, which calls their movement the Spring Revolution, promises a new federal democracy that will revolutionize the social and political order by instilling equality, pluralism, and tolerance for diversity, overturning the ethno-religious and other divisions spawned by military leaders to ensure control over a divided population.

It is a tall order, as I said earlier, and could take a generation to become reality, but a

wide majority of the Myanmar population considers this a more promising future for the country than a return to governance under the thumb of an unreconstructed military leadership.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Next, I'd like to ask Zeyar Win to begin his testimony. Mr. Win is a Burma Technical Specialist at the International Republican Institute.

You may begin your testimony.

MR. WIN: Thank you.

My name is Kyaw Zeyar Win. Thank you, Chair Turkel and Vice Chair Cooper, as well as other commissioners, for the opportunity to speak at this important hearing. I am grateful to join my distinguished fellow panelists in this hearing.

I am Burmese, and I am a Rohingya Muslim. I have been advocating for democracy and human rights for more than decades and have conducted extensive research on religious and communal

conflict. When I lived in Burma, I experienced the challenges of the religiously-based segregation, discrimination, and violence firsthand.

I left my country in July 2017 just before the military launched its brutal and indiscriminate operation against the Rohingya that killed more than 10,000 Rohingya, devastated 400 villages, and forced as many as 800,000 Rohingya to take refuge in Bangladesh.

Although I'm now safe in the U.S., several members of my family remain in Burma and in Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camps. I currently work as a Burma Technical Specialist at the International Republican Institute, IRI, which promotes democratic institutions and values around the world.

At today's hearing, I would like to highlight three ways that the Burmese military coup in February 2021 has affected religious freedom.

Firstly, the Burmese junta has politicized and weaponized religion. Since the coup, the junta has portrayed itself as the savior of Theravada

Buddhism and a promoter of the Burmese race, culture, and traditions.

The military and their political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party, justify the coup as necessary to defend Buddhism.

Moreover, the military has securitized or labeled the current pro-democracy movement as an existential threat to Burma's national identity, namely, Burmese culture and traditions that the military ostensibly protects.

The junta allows online and printed media to increasingly disseminate hate speech towards Rohingyas, other Muslims, and Christians in an effort to conflate religious "others" with the current pro-democracy movement.

This is part of a strategy to portray the current pro-democracy movement as foreign-sponsored and, therefore, an existential threat to the nation. This is more destructive than the outright restrictions on the rights and freedoms and beliefs of the religious minorities, and even though the military's use of the religion as a tool, political

tool, it's not a new phenomenon. This strategy has allowed Burma's junta to consolidate its inner circle, build public support, tarnish the pro-democracy activists as national traitors, and legitimize their brutal campaign against the civilians.

Secondly, the junta has allied itself with religious extremists and sought their support as leaders seek to defend Buddhist supremacy in Burma through whatever means necessary.

The military generals and their allied USDP patronize and fund a Buddhist supremacist organization called the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion, better known as Ma Ba Tha.

The junta recently granted honorary awards to ultranationalist Buddhist monk Wirathu, notoriously known as "Buddhist Bin Laden." In addition, the junta has equipped and trained ultranationalist pro-junta militia to counter local pro-democracy resistance forces.

In order to successfully co-opt religion,

military rulers have courted Buddhist chauvinists that threaten religious minorities.

Third, and finally, the junta's violence has deliberately targeted religious minorities. While the junta kills its opponents indiscriminately, they also deliberately target religious minorities and their houses of worship in ethnic minority areas.

According to the local news outlet, military forces have destroyed more than 160 religious buildings, including monasteries, churches, mosques, across Burma, in the last two years since the coup.

According to the local records from the Muslim community alone, at least 85 Muslims, including three maulvis/imams, were killed for their pro-democracy work.

Ten were arbitrarily arrested and beaten to death during interrogation or imprisonment. Locals perceive these incidents as an intentional attempt by the junta to oppress religious minorities and discourage support for the local

resistance movement.

So how should we address this issue? I believe there are three particular steps that the U.S. and its partners should take:

First, recognize the unique role of religion in Burma and develop de-securitization policies to shape the discourse.

Let me elaborate this argument. Religion is a private and individual matter in Western democratic society, but, in Burma, religion profoundly links with the local cultural norms and politics.

Many people in Burma have internalized the successive regimes' securitized anti-minority discourses; and, therefore, they perceive notions of inclusion or religious freedom as part of an Islamic or foreign agenda against Buddhism.

So, as such, the U.S. and its policymakers should utilize policies and tools to address this particular context and to de-securitize the existential threat discourse, while promoting integration and peaceful coexistence among Burma's

diverse community.

The U.S. government should also empower progressive voices among youth and faith actors to engage in a battle of ideas against the entrenched inflammatory rhetoric about non-Buddhist communities.

For instance, the U.S. government can increase public awareness on the junta's discriminatory policies, the monks' anti-minority ultranationalist tirades, and civic and social responsibility.

Second, invest in youth to foster inclusive citizenship that promotes civic nationalism rather than ethnocentrism.

Today, youth are drivers of change. Many young people in Burma explicitly challenge the famous monks for their support of the junta. This progressive attitude is a new development in Burmese society and a driving force for the success of the Burma Spring Revolution since the 2021 coup.

The U.S. should support this development by providing space for youth empowerment and

effective leadership culture, strengthening youth advocacy groups, and helping them build resilience to sustain their efforts.

Third, increase support to restore democracy and religious freedom in Burma. As long as Burma is a fragile and undemocratic state, it cannot function well, and its citizens will highly be vulnerable to attack on their fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of religion.

The U.S. government should support documentation of the regime's religious suppression, expose these violations, and continue to exert pressure on the junta to hold it accountable for their human rights abuses.

The U.S. should work closely with regional allies and partners, like Malaysia and Indonesia, who have spoken up about Burma's religious persecution in the past and since the coup.

Additionally, the U.S. government should continue funding the pro-democracy movement and those working to bring more inclusive, responsive, democratic government to Burma.

Leaders at the highest level in Congress and the administration should simultaneously focus on Burma and engage allies in the West and the region to put collective pressure on the junta to restore civilian rule through an all-inclusive political framework.

Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this hearing and share my testimony and recommendations. I would be happy to answer any questions that you have.

Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to move on to our next witness, Mr. Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director of the Chin Association of Maryland.

You may begin your testimony.

MR. HMUNG: Chair Turkel, Vice Chair Cooper, and members of the Commission, thank you for holding this important and timely hearing and inviting me to speak this morning.

My name is Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director of the Chin Association of Maryland. CAM

is a non-profit organization based here in Maryland with an office in Washington, D.C. We advocate for religious freedom and human rights in Burma. We also advocate for durable solutions for Chins and other refugees and internally displaced persons from Burma.

Since the 2021 coup, CAM has released three reports on the situation of the Christian minority in Burma. This testimony is based on our third report published last week. It is titled "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma."

This is also the title of my testimony this morning.

First, some background. The situation in Burma is worsening each day. According to U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk, the military and its allies have killed at least 2,890 people. The military has also burned down 34,000 civilian structures and detained 16,000 people across Burma.

The fighting has left over 1.2 million

additional internally displaced persons and over 70,000 additional refugees who have fled the country.

The largest group of the new wave of refugees are Chin Christians who have fled to India. They join over one million refugees who fled to neighboring countries from Burma before the coup, including over 700,000 Rohingyas.

I was born in Chin State, which borders Rakhine State. Therefore, I'm very familiar with the situation of Rohingya. Back in 2017, I posted a statement on my Facebook calling on my fellow Chins to join me in praying for the Rohingyas. I'm a Christian.

I said that they are also human beings created by God. I said that Rohingyas are also human beings. I've been deeply concerned for the Rohingyas in that there is still no accountability for the atrocities against them.

I commend the recent USCIRF statement calling for accountability.

In June 2021, the National Unity

Government, NUG, released a policy on the Rohingyas saying that, quote, "We will actively seek justice and accountability for crimes, all crimes committed by the military against the Rohingyas and all other people of Myanmar throughout our history."

Unquote.

Just after the 2021 coup, Christian leaders of Burma, including the Catholic Bishops Conference of Myanmar, the Myanmar Council of Churches, and the Myanmar Christ Mission Cooperation Board, issued a joint statement, quote: We share the fears and serious concern of all people in Myanmar over the Tatmadaw's control of power." Unquote.

ASEAN made a similar call in the first point of its Five-Point Consensus. First, there shall be immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar and all parties shall exercise utmost restraint.

In December 2022, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 2669 that, among other things, demands an immediate end to all forms of violence throughout the country.

Not only has the Tatmadaw so far ignored all of these calls to halt the violence, but they have increased their violence, tightened their control over Burma.

On February 3, 2023, the Tatmadaw extended their state of emergency for six months and imposed martial law in 37 townships in eight regions and states.

Unfortunately, with these negative developments, the voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of refugees back to Burma is not a viable option at this time.

We consider now the worsening situation for Christians. In Chin State and other areas with large populations of Christians, such as Kachin, Karen, Karenni States and Sagaing Region, the Tatmadaw burns churches and targets Christian religious leaders for arrest, arbitrary detention, imprisonment, and even killing.

Example one, Thantlang Town, Chin State. In September 2021, after the coup, the military began a campaign of arson in Thantlang Town. To

date, the Tatmadaw has burned 13 churches in Thantlang Town.

Reportedly, 1,400 homes and businesses have been burned down, and the entire population of Thantlang displaced.

During the town's burning, the military killed Pastor Cung Biak Hun. The destruction of Thantlang Town and targeting of its churches and pastors met with little international attention and no accountability.

The military suffered no consequences. Instead the military learned again that it can terrorize the population of Burma and religious minorities with impunity.

Since these attacks, the Tatmadaw has become bolder and more violent. Instead of just ground forces, it also now targets the civilian population with air strikes.

Next, to Kachin State and Mandalay Region. Among the arrested and detained Christian leaders is Reverend Dr. Hkalam Samson, advisor and former General Secretary and President of the Kachin

Baptist Convention.

Dr. Samson is detained at Myitkyina Prison, Kachin State. A credible source informed CAM that his hearing has been scheduled for February 14, 2023.

On December 7, 2022, Reverend Thian Lian Sang of Falam Baptist Church in Mandalay, Mandalay Region, was sentenced to 23 years. He is imprisoned in Obo Prison, Mandalay.

Now I turn to Sagaing Region. On November 24, 2022, the Tatmadaw ravaged Mon Hla, the hometown of Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon and Archbishop Marco Tin Win of Mandalay. The military killed a seven-year-old child, a 40-year-old woman, and a 30-year-old man, all civilians, and burned down 200 of the 700 buildings in the village, including a church and school for which Cardinal Bo helped raise funds.

At 8 a.m. in the morning on January 14, 2023, Tatmadaw troops entered Chan Thar village and spent all day burning down houses. They stay overnight in the Church of Our Lady of the

Assumption, a 129-year old building. The next day, on Sunday morning, January 15th, they set fire to the church, along with the parish priest's house and the nuns' convent.

On January 22nd, Pope Francis expressed sadness for these attacks. Quote: "Sadly, my thoughts turns in particular to Myanmar, where the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in the village of Chan Thar—one of the most ancient and important places of worship in the country—was burned and destroyed. I am close to the helpless civilian population subject to severe trials in many cities. Please God that this conflict will soon come to an end, opening a new period of forgiveness, love and peace. Let us pray together to Our Lady for Myanmar." Unquote,

My written testimony and the CAM reports have more details of the Tatmadaw's atrocities. I encourage you to read them.

In conclusion, I have the following recommendations to the U.S. Congress:

Conduct a congressional fact-finding

mission to the India-Burma border area and the Thai-Burma border area related to the protections of IDPs and refugees and atrocities against religious minorities.

Include language condemning the violations of religious freedom by the Tatmadaw in future U.S. legislation and U.N. resolutions on Burma, especially at the U.N. Security Council.

For the administration, designate atrocities against Christian minorities, especially the Chins, as war crimes and crimes against humanity, consistent with the designation of crimes targeting the Rohingyas.

Given the Tatmadaw's increased air attacks, I add another recommendation to the administration: work with NUG, National Unity Government, ethnic armed organizations, and others to allocate some of the non-lethal assistance for protection of the civilians from the Tatmadaw's air attacks.

Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to move on to our final witness, Wai Wai Nu, Burmese activist, who previously came to testify at our hearing. I'm pleased to have her as a witness today.

Wai Wai Nu, you may begin your testimony.

MS. NU: Thank you, Chair Turkel and Vice Chair Cooper, and to the whole U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, for inviting me to testify before you today.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to share my remarks alongside my fellow panelists, following my participation in the Commission's previous hearing about the U.S. genocide determinations and their potential to prevent atrocities across the world.

Through our focus on Burma's religious freedom violations today, I hope that the U.S. will be encouraged to effectively address the ongoing human rights and humanitarian catastrophe in the country.

Ethnic and religious minorities in Burma have long believed in the U.S. potential to help

bring them justice and accountability. This is because we have been persecuted for decades by being in a country—apology—this is because we have been persecuted for decades by being in a country dominated by Buddhism and the Bamar ethnic group.

The Burmese military manipulated these differences to pit us against each other and justify its brutal attempts to control us by committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and—against Rohingya—genocide.

Due to these decades of impunity, the Burmese military launched an attempted coup over two years ago and has since committed more mass atrocities that amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes according to the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and other United Nations and independent expert bodies.

Ethnic and religious minorities are now facing such atrocities at an escalating level; this includes a heightened risk of recurrence of genocidal attacks against the Rohingya.

I, myself, join you today after facing

years of persecution as a Rohingya and Muslim woman in Burma. Due to my identity, the military imprisoned me and my family as political prisoners for seven years.

My experience as an ethnic and religious minority in Burma and my time with the women detainees have since fueled my activism to end all forms of injustice in the country.

Today, many more members of the pro-democracy movement are risking everything to ensure that Burma's federal democracy will be far from the so-called democratic transitions of the past.

We must never forget that during that decade-long period, Rohingya Muslims were denied of citizenship, voting rights, and instead targeted with widespread hate speech, waves of state-sponsored violence, and the military's genocidal attacks.

While we reflect and change, the Burmese military continue to intensify its brutal practices across the country. Since the attempted coup, the military has intensified its airstrikes and

shelling in areas primarily resided by the ethnic and religious minorities.

The military is arbitrarily arresting and murdering pastors and other clergy members from the communities such as Chin and Kachin. The military is also destroying churches and convents with heavy weapons in Karen and other areas.

After releasing the notorious anti-Muslim monk Wirathu from prison, the military awarded him with an honorary title. The military and its supporters are now spreading hate speech and disinformation against Muslims and Rohingya, as well as women human rights defenders, on online platforms, such as Facebook, TikTok and Telegram.

The military is also issuing past and new policies to further confine the over 600,000 Rohingya in Burma, who include the over 140,000 in internally displaced persons' camps in Rakhine State.

These apartheid-like policies include restrictions on Rohingya's freedom of movement; more requirements for the use of discriminatory

National Verification Cards; and frequent administrations of the SweTinSit, or abusive family check-in process. These policies are restricting Rohingyas' access to healthcare, education, mosques, livelihood, and other basic needs.

The military is fundamentally using these policies as arbitrary grounds to arrest and detain Rohingya.

According to my organization, the Women's Peace Network, the military has arbitrarily arrested at least 2,700 Rohingya since the attempted coup, including over 800 women. The clashes between the military and Arakan Army in Rakhine State, despite their so-called "ceasefire," will continue to pose life-threatening risks to the Rohingya in Burma.

Millions of people in Burma have thus been forced to flee their homes as IDPs and refugees over the past two years. All of them are denied reliable access to basic needs, safety and services, as well as safety and protection.

In Bangladesh and other countries in South

and Southeast Asia, over one million Rohingya refugees are facing increasing securitization and surveillance from the squalid camps to the Bhashan Char Island.

Among them, women and children are at particular risk of sexual violence and sexual exploitations from the members of their community and the local authorities.

In countries that include India and Malaysia, Rohingya refugees risk forced deportation to Burma. None of these communities are granted access to justice mechanisms.

These deteriorating conditions, both in Burma and Bangladesh, are leaving Rohingya with no options but to escape by perilous journeys that endanger them with human trafficking and deadly sea crossings. This was most recently demonstrated in the end of 2022, when hundreds of Rohingya fled by at least 12 boats, one of which carrying 180 people went missing.

After these decades of military's mass atrocities, it is devastating that the

international community is still failing to protect Rohingya and all people in Burma.

These delays in bringing justice and accountability to Burma has only emboldened the military to commit more atrocities against us.

We feel disappointed because we know that under the U.S. leadership, the international community can have the political will to pursue these actions. We were reminded of this potential in the international community's immediate response to the war in Ukraine.

While we appreciate the State Department's official determination of the Burmese military's atrocities and Rohingya genocide, as well as the Congress' passage of the BURMA Act, these momentous acts require further measures to end human rights and humanitarian catastrophe in Burma.

Therefore, today, I urge the U.S. to bolster the measures that it has taken with a comprehensive and sustainable strategy beyond ASEAN's failed Five-Point Consensus. These measures must address both the short and long-term

needs of Rohingya and other ethnic and religious minorities in the country.

First, the U.S. government must provide a greater financial and material and technical support to empower ethnic and religious minorities in Burma and those displaced in Bangladesh and other countries in South and Southeast Asia. This assistance should be delivered to these communities' civil societies, especially women's groups and youth groups.

Second, the U.S. must implement more measures to protect these ethnic and religious minorities. Such protection mechanisms should include support for the communities' resettlement in third countries over their arrest, detention, and deportation by host countries.

These mechanisms should also include actions to hold the Burmese military accountable for its international crimes. Especially, the U.S. should curb the military's weapons and financial flows by imposing economic sanctions, particularly against the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, as well

as a ban on military's aviation fuel supply.

For Rohingya, the U.S. Congress should include these measures in a legislation aimed at bringing the communities out of genocide. This is one practical step, a step to effectuate last year's atrocity determinations, and to fill a major shortcoming of the BURMA Act.

This legislation should ensure the U.S.' coordination with the governments in ASEAN and other countries to deploy search-and-rescue missions for the Rohingya stranded on the boats in their respective jurisdiction.

This should also include measures for the Rohingya in the period after the attempted coup. These measures should involve the U.S.' support for an effective transitional justice process for Rohingya's justice, repatriation, reparations, reconciliation, and rehabilitations in the country.

As Secretary Blinken shared in his speech when announcing the genocide determination, I quote: "Ultimately, the path out of genocide also leads home." Quote.

A safe, dignified, and voluntary return to their ancestral homes in Arakan, Burma is what the Rohingya community needed and wants the most. In this context, U.S. must also support the Burmese political leadership in their effort to protect religious freedom and beliefs in our federally democratic future. These processes should no longer repeat Burma's historical patterns of excluding Rohingya and Muslims. The National Unity Government and the National Unity Consultative Council should thus effectively involve these groups in their governance, administration, and leaderships.

Special measures to protect the identity and existence of Rohingya, such as by granting them a "protected status," in Burma's federal democratic future should be also considered.

Lastly, the U.S. must lead the way for the international community to meaningfully engage with the ethnic and religious minorities, especially women and youths, in all discussions and mechanisms about Burma's federally democratic future.

Over the past two years, since the Burmese military's attempted coup and after decades of its atrocities, the U.S. should not betray our people's hope for justice, democracy, and freedom.

Only through acting for these values, and ending impunity in Burma, can Rohingya and other ethnic and religious minorities finally live in peace and harmony.

Thank you for your work. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much. I wanted to thank all of our witnesses.

Now we're going to move on to the Q&A session. I'd like to recognize Commissioner Frank Wolf to make comments or ask questions.

COMMISSIONER WOLF: Thank you, Chairman Turkel. I appreciate it very much.

I want to thank the panelists. I learned a lot. I have a couple quick questions, and I know there are others so I'll be very fast.

What countries aid the Burmese government, aid the military? Where does the Burmese military

get their weapons from? What country aids them?

MS. CLAPP: Shall I begin to answer?

COMMISSIONER WOLF: Anyone.

MS. CLAPP: Okay.

CHAIR TURKEL: Before you begin, I'd like to note that we have very limited time for Q&A session. I'd like to afford an opportunity for each commissioner to make comments and ask questions. If you can keep your answers brief, as brief as possible, it would be great.

Thank you. Thank you.

MS. CLAPP: Shall I go ahead and answer?

CHAIR TURKEL: Yes, yes, yes, please.

MS. CLAPP: Okay. Primarily China is a long-term supplier of military weapons and training to the Burmese military. But more recently, Russia has stepped in with advanced weapons, and particularly the very destructive weapons that the military is using against the civilian population now in the form of jet fighters, helicopters and heavy artillery.

And Russia is taking delight in meddling

in this conflict, as they do elsewhere in the world.

COMMISSIONER WOLF: Out of respect for the other commissioners, I won't ask the other question, but that's the-genocide. And China is aiding Burma. That's, the Commission ought to make this really clear as we file reports, China and Russia are aiding people that are involved in genocide, and they should be called out for it.

I want to thank the witnesses. I want to defer to the others because I know there's a lot of questions, but China, China, China, is coming up again, and we should do something about it.

MS. CLAPP: Let me add one further point. China is also arming the opposition. [Laughter.] So they're arming both sides.

CHAIR TURKEL: Divide and conquer.

MS. CLAPP: Yes.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you, Commissioner Frank Wolf.

If I may, I'd like to ask Commissioner Fred Davie to make comments or ask any questions

that he may have.

COMMISSIONER DAVIE: Thank you, Chair Turkel, and I want to thank the panelists also for their testimony and for their witness to the atrocities going on now in Burma and the recommendations that they have, that they have made.

My question is for Mr. Win, and it has to do with what a post-junta or regime might look like. We see that, that, that Buddhism has been weaponized in many ways, and that there is this sort of fundamental—there are these fundamentalist interpretations of Buddhism that have pushed violent conflict.

So the question is, on the other side of a junta rule, in a new government, should we get there, is there still concern, would there still be concern about violence from fundamentalist forces rooted in these sort of radical interpretations or fundamentalist interpretations of Buddhism?

So your concern about fundamentalist Buddhism continuing to be a radical force in the

country on the other side of a junta rule?

MR. WIN: Thank you.

That's a good question. So, in this case, yes, we still can concern, even though, you know, changing the law or the regime change because the problem is two-sided like the structure and also the contents, like the culture, I mean let me explain shortly with my experience, personal experience.

When I was in Burma and I was a fresh doctor in 2008 so the sanitation came in my clinic, and then they saw me, and, hey, this is a doctor, and then they went back. They didn't talk to me anymore.

Again and again, this experience made me traumatized, and, you know, now I recall my experience, but at that time, it's not easy like that. And that kind of experience, but I learned from that experience, and I noticed that this is not only the government policy. This is not, not only because of the discriminatory law. The problem itself is in the society, negative

attitude, a lot of stereotypes, they are internalized by the long-term propaganda and the discourses.

So we need to address both top down and also bottom up like even though the regime change or even though we overcome the legal restrictions, we still, the problem is still in the society.

We also need to engage in this, the societal, the-the societal attitude change. That's why I, I recommend the first recommendation is to address the discourses and to recognize, recognize the unique situation in Burma. So, otherwise, the problem still be happening even though whoever ruled the country.

So thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER DAVIE: Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

I'd like to recognize Commissioner David Curry for comments or questions.

COMMISSIONER CURRY: Thank you, chairman.

I have a question for Zo Tum Hmung. The ASEAN members have missed some opportunities to

speak out. Now Indonesia is going to be leading that.

Do you have any hope that they're going to be able to hold Burma accountable? That's part one.

The second part is maybe you could identify if there are natural partners in the ASEAN member countries who are willing to do so? If you know of any?

MR. HMUNG: Thank you for the question.

I'm hopeful because Indonesia is the largest country in ASEAN. And I'm also hopeful that Malaysia will be more proactive in joining the ASEAN efforts.

But I don't think that ASEAN efforts would be enough. We need more active engagement from the U.S. We need the U.S. engagement, and then also not only ASEAN. I think we need India as well.

So there has to be more partners and allies approach. ASEAN alone won't be enough to change the behavior of the Tatmadaw because we had experiences before. But I'm really hopeful because

now Indonesia is taking the lead.

COMMISSIONER CURRY: Great. Thank you so much. And let me thank all the panelists. I thought the testimonies were very powerful. So appreciate it.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you, Commissioner Curry.

Commissioner Magid, I thought that you might have a comment or questions.

COMMISSIONER MAGID: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

I've been in the Rohingya camps like three times in Bangladesh, and it's very close to my heart. I remember a lady told me are you going to do something about it or just visit and look at us and walk away? That was very haunting me always, and one of the reasons actually I joined this Commission, to try to help someone like her.

But my question is that you have, you have addressed the issue of community level of hatred and tension. There's a policy aspect of religious freedom and there's societal and community aspect

of religious freedom.

My worry is that the religious leader, the Buddhists, in Myanmar are paramount, that they need to—Burma—they need to take initiative to address the issue of hatred that really is spread in that country.

One of the questions that I have, have we or do you think a good idea to use other Buddhist leaders around the world, whom they would listen to from their Buddhist leaders, hear from Taiwan, from Japan? Where you can turn to religious leaders, Buddhists, maybe can train, bring those leaders to a neutral place so that they can undo the damage of propaganda and dehumanization of the Rohingyas especially?

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

Now I'd like to go back to Vice Chair Cooper and Commissioner Schneck for comments or follow-up questions.

VICE CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, Chair, and I'll try to keep my comments very succinct.

The witnesses were incredible, and I think

everybody on the Commission feels we need to do more—we'll have to reflect on that—on a practical basis.

But I think the most important point, again, was made by Congressman Wolf, and that is we that we may also have to take a more holistic approach. When we see China's name coming up again and again and again, I think when we get together as a full Commission, amongst ourselves, to talk about what more we can do, also in terms of utilizing our contacts, but also in pressuring Capitol Hill and the Secretary of State's office to follow, just really to follow the lead of what's going on and how profoundly negative and pernicious impact China now plays in its region and beyond.

And, of course, nobody here is surprised about how Russia continues its historic move. But if we're going to gain anything in terms of leverage, I think what we've learned today is we're going to have to increase our lens beyond just the borders of Burma in order to try to impact on the issue.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

Commissioner Schneck.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thanks, Mr.
Chairman.

I too want to congratulate and thank all of the panelists, all the witnesses, today for really profound testimony, and it's given the Commission much to think about.

I just have a very specific question, and to make it I guess a bit more pointed, I'd like to address it to Wai Wai Nu.

Ms. Nu, broken countries, we have seen historically, often devolve into warring factions along ethnic and religious lines. We saw that in the Balkans. We saw that in the Middle East. We see it in Africa today.

And I guess that the hope currently for Burma is that the NUG will be able to form a government that will not allow that kind of devolution to take place in the country in a post-Tatmadaw dictatorship situation.

I'm wondering if you have confidence in

the ability of the NUG to play that role?

MS. NU: Thank you, Commissioner, for your excellent and important question.

The very reason the genocide against the Rohingya escalated from 2012 and happened in 2017 attacks, happened in 2016 and '17, is because of the missed opportunities for the transitional governments to address transitional justice, to address the impunity that the militaries enjoyed before the so-called democratic transition.

They walked away from the country's fundamental problems, and that allows the military to further utilize this race and religion quote to launch attacks against the genocide.

And the Burmese National Unity Government or future transitional government should not repeat these mistakes. And this should be reminding them all the time and every time because, as previous speakers have mentioned, described, the Burmese problem is especially when it's come to ethnic and religious minorities, crises and genocide, it's not just a matter of military dictatorship. Of course,

the military is the main perpetrator, and military has systematically promoted Buddhist Burman nationalism.

And society now has internalized from the top politician to the religious leaders to the media. So it requires a lot of effort from short-term and medium-term and long-term approach to address the fundamental issues as fundamental problems of the ethnic and religious communities, as well as a short-term immediate approach to protect the people, and the impunity of the military.

When it comes to long-term approach, I think one way to address is by having effective transitional justice mechanism. Regardless of who is in power and who will be in power, whether it's National Unity Government or other bodies, if we are not able to prepare and develop an effective strategy, how are we going to prepare for the post-coup, and how are we going to rebuild the country, and address these crimes?

And without having that policy, we are not

going to be able to address the country's situations. And in this transitional justice process, I think it has to have a stronger focus on the Rohingya genocide and crimes against other ethnic minorities' populations.

It should include truth and reconciliation commissions to the other local justice processes, and it can be equipped or complemented by the, for example, the religious leaders' involvement, and among the public society through the treaty broadcasting to the education reform, to the policy reform, from the democratic, federal democratic charter to the new constitution.

It has a stronger focus on the transitional justice and protections of the ethnic and religious minorities, addressing Burmese Buddhists supremacism and nationalisms in Burma.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

Following Wai Wai Win's powerful remarks, I'd like to ask the rest of the panel, the witnesses, starting with former de charge Clapp and the other two witnesses to share with us any final

thoughts or comments that you would like to make before we close.

MS. CLAPP: I'd like to make one final thought or offer one final thought. The ten years of relative, and I stress relative, freedom that occurred in the country between 2011 and 2021, during that period, a new generation came of age and were educated differently, became much more aware of the outside world, of what the fundamentals of democracy are, and the need for dealing with diversity.

20 years ago, we would not have been able to have this kind of a conversation with young people from Burma, and I think that they have made very powerful statements today, and their views are shared by many of the young people that are behind this rebellion right now.

It's the young people who are taking control of the country, and I have faith that they can learn along the way, and that we can help them.

Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much.

Mr. Win.

MR. WIN: Yes. Just a short remark, final thought, you know, since the coup, we see obviously that the especially young people and their progressive attitude towards the minorities and diversity, and even they show their sympathy, and they recognize they are ignorant on the Rohingya situations.

So this is the positive development obviously, and that should be anchorage. That should be amplified to overcome the religious freedom and the religious persecution in the future.

Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

Mr. Hmung.

MR. HMUNG: Again, thank you so much for holding this hearing. This is very important to us.

As I mentioned in my recommendations, I really would like to see the language of persecutions of minority religions in the future legislation. For example, the BURMA Act, which is

a part of NDAA, H.R. 776, that must include the religious freedom.

The U.N. Security Council Resolution 2669 does not include the persecutions of Christians, other, so currently there are two legislations introduced, one at the Senate and another one at the House.

These resolutions, if they could include the religious freedom issue, I think that would be very helpful.

And then also another one I would like to repeat, moving forward, how we can topple down this military regime, I think one of the best ways is, as I mentioned in my recommendation, how to protect the civilians, how to protect from the air attacks.

So not only China, but Russia, has been supplying this. Russia, Russia, the air attacks. So now the Tatmadaw has been using these air attacks not only on the ground. So the non-lethal, if the non-lethal assistance can include something, you know, that can protect the civilians from the air strikes, I think, that would be very, very

helpful.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much.

Thank you. I wanted to thank our witnesses for taking the time and share their experience and wisdom, and I also wanted to thank our witnesses for their amazing work, shining a spotlight on the ongoing genocide against Rohingya people in Burma.

In the meantime, I wanted to thank our commissioners for taking the time from their busy schedule to join in this important hearing, and finally I wanted to thank our professional staff team, led by Executive Director Erin Singshinsuk, Elizabeth Cassidy, and our policy analyst Patrick Greenwalt, and Veronica McCarthy, for amazing work for the past weeks to put together this hearing for us.

In conclusion, I'd like to point out that giving a proper name for atrocity crimes, as has been done by the Biden Administration, specifically Secretary Blinken, is a policy statement.

What follows next is the most important

thing. As we speak, there are at least known two genocides are underway. We have to fulfill our treaty obligation, moral obligation to stop this so that promise "never again" can be meaningful, and we can prevent the next genocide.

Unless we take bold action, sometime putting aside geopolitical interests, we'll keep seeing this kind of atrocity crimes and genocide against vulnerable ethno-religious groups.

With that, I wanted to thank you all again, and this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:04 p.m. ET, the hearing was adjourned.]